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ST 753 The Human Person: Multidisciplinary Perspectives

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Asbury Theological Seminary
The Human Person:
Multidisciplinary Perspectives

ST753

Fall 2008 – Extended Learning

Brian G. Edgar,
Professor of Theological Studies
Asbury Theological Seminary

*A study in theological anthropology
with a focus on being human in the 21st century*

Credit hours: 3 Pre-requisites: ST 501

Preliminary syllabus

A revised syllabus may be provided at the start of the course. However, apart from matters outside of my control, the material contained here regarding texts etc can be relied upon.

Course Description

This course provides biblical and theological material on the nature of humanity, understood individually, socially and cosmically. It reflects on the critical place theological anthropology has in the whole scheme of theological reflection in general, as well as in popular, scientific and cultural contexts. It applies this understanding of the person to practical issues of spirituality, ethics and discipleship.

Course Outcomes

1. The development of a mature biblical and theological understanding of the person as an individual, a social being and a part of the cosmos in the light of recent reflections on the nature of the person.
2. To demonstrate the critical place that theological anthropology has as a discipline within the whole structure of theological reflection.
3. To integrate biblical, theological, historical, philosophical, scientific and cultural understandings of humanity.
4. To enhance Christian discipleship through an understanding of the way various aspects of theological anthropology underlie many contemporary issues.

Required texts

Southgate, Christopher *et al*, *God, Humanity and the Cosmos: a textbook in science and religion*
Edinburgh: T and T Clark 1999 – pages 1-286, 329-398 - 350 pages

John J. Davis, *The Frontiers of Science and Faith: examining questions from the big bang to the end of the universe*, Downers Grove: IVP, 2002 – 180 pages

Green, Joel. (ed), *What about the Soul? Neuroscience and Christian Anthropology*, Nashville: Abingdon, 2004. – 190 pages

Mitchell, C. Ben, Edmund D. Pellegrino, Jean Bethke Elshtain, John F. Kilner, Scott B. Rae,
Biotechnology and the Human Good, Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2007 – 220 pages

Sherlock, Charles, *The Doctrine of Humanity*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996 – 240 pages

Recommended texts

- Anderson, Ray, A. *On Being Human*, Eerdmans, 1982.
- Barrett, William. *The Death of the Soul: From Descartes to the Computer*, Anchor Doubleday, 1987.
- Beck and Bruce Demarest, *The Human Person in Theology and Psychology*, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005
- Brown, Warren S., Murphy, Nancey & Malony, Newton, H., *Whatever happened to the Soul? Scientific & Theological Portraits of Human Nature*, Augsburg Fortress 1998.
- Cooper, John W. *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting*, Eerdmans, 1989.
- Davis, John J. *Frontiers of Science and Faith: from the Big Bang to the End of the Universe*, IVP, 2002
- Green, Joel and Stuart Palmer, (ed), *In Search of the Soul*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005
- Grenz, Stanley. *The Social God and the Relational Self: a Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*, Westminster John Knox, 2001.
- Hefner, Philip. *The Human Factor*, Fortress, 1993
- LeRon Shults, F. *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical turn to Relationality*, Eerdmans, 2003.
- Morland, J.P. and D. M. Ciochi, *Christian Perspectives on Being Human*, Baker, 1993.
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, Westminster, 1985

Course Outline

1. Biblical perspectives on humanity

- 1.1 Introduction; What is the essence of humanity? Basic, biblical affirmations about the person.
- 1.2 An examination of the functions of the soul/the person in the overall theological scheme, especially with regard to the primary, traditional areas of spirituality, ethical value and eschatology.

2. The rise, the fall, and the rise again of theological anthropology

- 2.1 The interaction of philosophy, theology and anthropology.
- 2.2 An examination of the emergence of anthropology as a foundational discipline in theological thinking.
- 2.3 The current alternatives in modern and post-modern perspectives.

3. Humanity in God's overall purpose for the universe.

- 3.1 Finding meaning and purpose for the existence of humanity in the context of the universe. Creation and the anthropic principle (weak, strong and moderate; intelligent design).
- 3.2 Anthropology and Christology: humanity as created being and also in relationship with Jesus Christ.
- 3.3 Humanity and the natural world: continuity and uniqueness. A comparison of anthropocentric, biocentric and theocentric perspectives on the world and their implications for environmental thought.
- 3.4 Anthropocentricity, the scientific and theological uniqueness of human life and the possibility of intelligent alien life possible.

4. Humanity within the created world

- 4.1 Humanity as created but fallen and sinful; the scientific and theological relationships between 'Adam', 'adam' and sin?
- 4.2 Humanity as a part of the created world; Darwinism considered theologically: compatibilities, problems and issues.
- 4.3 Humanity as created, co-creators and pro-creators. The possibilities of genetic control of the future nature of the person in relationship to a theology of creation.

5. Individual humanity: anthropological issues at the beginning of human life

- 5.1 The incarnation, personality and the soul: theological reflections on the nature of the person in individual, social and genetic contexts..
- 5.2 Deciding about the beginning and the value of human life in the light of human reproductive and genetic technology (examples from IVF, ET, GIFT, cryopreservation, embryo research and stem cells).
- 5.3 The relationship of the quality and the sanctity of life.

6. Social humanity: living together as persons

- 6.1 Issues relating to the social dimension of humanity: a theology of persons in community.
- 6.2 Current issues for human life together resulting from technological changes (eg. donors, surrogacy, cloning) in relation to theological principles.
- 6.3 Future issues for human life together including human aging and the possibility of indefinite life-spans.

7. Determinism and human freedom

- 7.1 The extent to which humanity is free or determined - considering the findings of sociobiology and quantum theory. Wesleyan and other perspectives in modern context.
- 7.2 Human free will and the possibility of love; dealing with addictions and their implications for understanding human nature; healing prayer and the spiritual life.

8. Spirituality, sexuality, psychology the soul and sin

- 8.1 Psychology and the soul: brains, minds and consciousness; artificial intelligence; religious experience; love, altruism and religious faith.
- 8.2 Spirituality and sexuality: the origins of sexuality and the understanding of the human person as a social, sexual, spiritual being considered scientifically, philosophically and theologically. Spirituality, the soul and sexuality; genes, determinism and free will.
- 8.3 Psychology and theological approaches to sin: empirical; paradigmatic; the origin of evil approach; ontological and theological.

9. The future of humanity

- 9.1 Theological themes: death; resurrection; transformation; consummation of all things; the place of humanity in God's world.
- 9.2 Individual futures: theological issues relating to ending life (eg euthanasia).
- 9.3 Social futures: artificial intelligence and the human-machine interface; the limits of human-ness.
- 9.4 Cosmic futures and humanity: quantum physics and predicting the future; the end of the universe.

Professor

Dr Edgar is Professor of Theological Studies, Asbury Theological Seminary. He is an Australian scholar who has taught for many years in undergraduate and graduate programs at a number of Australian and international theological institutions. Previously he was the Director of Theology and Public Policy for the Australian Evangelical Alliance. Other ministries include being Moderator for Philosophy and Ethics for the Australian College of Theology (Australia's largest theological accrediting agency); being advisor on ethics to Australia's Gene Technology Regulator (who authorizes all artificial gene manipulations); and being a member of the World Evangelical Alliance's Theological Commission. He is a Fellow of the Institute for the Study of Christianity in an Age of Science and Technology; a double award winner with the Templeton Foundation's program for the conduct of courses on science and faith; a winner of a Templeton award for writing on science and faith; the author of *The Message of the Trinity* (IVP, 2004) and a number of articles on theological topics especially theological anthropology. He taught this course on campus in Wilmore in 2005 and prior to that at other institutions.

Contact Professor

- *Email:* My general email address is brian_edgar@asburyseminary.edu and anything sent to that address will, naturally, go to my mailbox, but for the purposes of this class if you have anything that should be said to me alone about the class (issues with your work, your grades, personal matters not for the whole of the class) please be sure that you send them to **the Professor** and not either my mailbox or the class Forums. Your assignments which are to be graded should be posted to the appropriate assignment link in Moodle.

It is good to get into the habit of double-checking with yourself before clicking 'send' by asking 'Am I sending this to the right place?' The rest of the class/team does not want or need to see, for example, either your pleas for more time for an assignment or my answer!

- *Mail:* Contact by mail should not be the norm. However, my address is 20 Highland Boulevard, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia, 3134.
- *Telephone:* Telephone contact will not be the norm, however can be negotiated. If you feel like calling please note that there is a considerable difference in time zones – a factor complicated by changes as a result of summer times in both Australia and the US. + 61-3-98122294
- *Skype:* Search for brianedgar1 This will not be the norm either but is a possibility. I can video Skype if you like.

Assessment

In addition to the specific course assessments noted below there are non-assessed but compulsory requirements of the course. These parallel the usual on-campus requirement that students attend classes. They include certain reading which must be done and which may require a written response or simply an indication that the reading has been completed.

Overview:

1. On-line responses to questions and group discussion: each module, and often each week of a module, will require on-line responses to specific questions and general interaction with other students. You will be assessed on the timeliness and quality of these responses. (20%)
2. A discussion paper of between 850 and 1150 words (15%). Due on TBA.
3. A 3000 word paper on a topic of your choosing which relates to any area covered in the syllabus. The topic for the paper needs to be approved during Module 3 at the very latest. (50%) Due on TBA.
4. A critical and analytical review of any one of the five required texts. (15%) Due on TBA.

Assessments in detail:

Requirement 1. On-line Responses

You will make postings in the appropriate **Forum** within each module. Each discussion **Forum** will have its own topic.

Secondly, you may be making postings based on teams. You will only participate with team members in certain **Forums**. This is because some discussions are simply too cumbersome with the whole class. It is better if numbers are limited by dividing the class into teams. If the class is small enough, however, we will operate entirely as a single Team.

You will be notified of your team. You will need to keep an eye on the whole-of-class discussions that will take place in the **Forums** as well as the Team-specific discussion forums which will take place within the modules.

This on-line interaction is not only necessary educationally, it is, in effect, an indication of ‘attendance’ in the class. Attendance (ie participation through posting) is a requirement of the course and of the Seminary as a whole as Federal financial support is dependent upon it and authorities can require Asbury to provide evidence of participation. If there is a week where you are not able to participate you need to discuss that with me.

Participation in on-line postings and discussion will be assessed (20%). There are two parts to this:

(a) **Responses to set questions** – which means posting at least 200 words per week on one or more of the set questions interaction with other students; and

(b) **Other comments** initiating discussion or responding to other people’s postings.

Assessment of on-line interaction

How often do I need to be on-line? You should be reading and posting to the appropriate forums at least once each week. Preferably twice; More often is possible and can be helpful but can also be counter-productive if the quality goes down!

How many postings do I need to make? Each week you will typically need to be posting your own responses to a set question or questions and *also* responding to one or more postings by others. So two postings would usually be expected, perhaps on the same day, perhaps not.

How long should they be? There is no standard. This will vary. Where there are set questions you need to answer them but most of the time the point is not to be as expansive as you can but to state the point as simply as possible. Interactions with other postings can vary from a single word to several paragraphs.

The assessment is based upon -

1. *Quality* – this is the key issue, and your responses to the set questions are central. You will primarily be assessed on these but other responses you make to other people’s postings will also be taken into account.
2. *Quantity* – it is not always the case that more is better but avoid minimalism.
3. *Frequency* – weekly contributions are required. Several contributions a week are encouraged. But dozens are not!
4. *Timeliness* – keeping up with a discussion is helpful. (But sometimes it is better to let an issue work its way through the brain before replying (!☺) so don’t let time stop you from responding to an earlier posting – though not all the time!
5. *Accuracy* – are the responses to the set questions accurate? Do they summarize the material accurately, or comment appropriately or assess with insight – according to the need of the question?
6. *Appropriateness* – does the posting relate to the issue; does it advance the line of thought?
7. *Theological Insight* – does the posting represent good theological/biblical insight?

8. *Practical application* – does the posting help apply theology to life?

Requirement 2: A discussion paper:

A discussion paper of 1000 words (+/- 15%) is due on TBA (10%)

The paper is to be a critical analysis of the issues raised any one chapter of any of the five required texts. If using Southgate it is possible to work with less than a whole chapter but with one or more sections (as long as the section is not less than, say, 10 or 15 pages).

The paper should not merely repeat or summarize the text (please assume the reader has read it!) but should (for instance) analyze it, place it in context by comparison with other approaches, explore the presuppositions, question the conclusions and critique the method etc. The assignment is not only a critique of the chapter but of the issue that it discusses.

NB. You cannot do Requirement 4 on the same book you have used in this assignment. So check out what you want to do with Requirement 4 before finally deciding on this assignment.

Requirement 3: One 3000 word paper

You are required to write a 3000 word paper on a topic of your choosing which relates to any area covered in the syllabus. The topic for the paper needs to be approved during Module 3 at the very latest. The paper is due on TBA. (50%)

You are strongly advised to undertake a bibliographical research very early in the process to establish that you have enough resources available to you for this piece of work.

When assessing the essay (and often with other assignments) I will be asking whether the following points have been properly addressed; whether they have been dealt with adequately or whether they deserve higher credit. Because papers vary the extent to which each of these applies will also vary. A topic which is inherently biblical will have more than average weight placed on B3, for example. Note the three general areas. However, while it is likely that these three areas will unfold in the paper progressively, I do not necessarily expect to see three separate sections related to these three areas of concern. They will all emerge, more or less, in all sections of the paper.

A: Comprehension and knowledge

1. Understanding of the central issue(s):
2. Awareness of variations/different points of view/minor themes.
3. Elaboration of the issues involved grasp of detail
4. Use/acknowledgement of source.

B: Analysis and synthesis

1. Logic and development of the paper
2. Level and quality of analysis of the material presented
3. Use of relevant Biblical material.
4. Overall comprehensiveness

C: Application and evaluation

1. Presentation of a central argument.
2. Ability to constructively criticize.
3. Theological perception/logic.
4. Application of theological insights

D. Presentation

1. Conformity to style guide
2. Style, spelling, sentences, structure.

Requirement 4: an analytical book review

A critical and analytical review of any one of the five required texts of 1500 words (+/- 15%). Due absolutely no later than TBA. (20%)

Although this exercise is referred to as a book review, that title can be a little misleading. This is not the kind of book review which majors on discussing the literary style of the writer, nor is there any great need to spend a lot of time outlining the contents of the book – you should assume that the reader is familiar with the contents.

Consequently, your aim should be more analytical and critical. That is, you want to analyze the thinking of the writer or writers, this means discerning their approach and their aims and presuppositions. You want to discern whether there is some central point or objective or perhaps some theological view which permeates the whole book. That is, you must be analytical. You must also be critical, in the best sense of the word. Evaluating the work and making judgments about it and locating it in the general context of other discussions and approaches.

NB. You cannot do Requirement 4 on the same book you have used in Requirement 2.

Grading criteria

Refer to the Academic Catalog for further information. The following descriptions will provide the guidelines for grades based.

- A = Exceptional work: surpassing, markedly outstanding achievement of course objectives
- B = Good work: strong, significant achievement of course objectives
- C = Acceptable work: basic, essential achievement of course objectives
- D = Marginal work: minimal or inadequate achievement of course objectives
- F = Unacceptable work: failure to achieve course objectives

However, some assignments lend themselves better to scoring by numerical assessment rather than by assigning a letter grade initially. These numerical scorings must be converted to letter grades for recording at the end of the semester. The following breakdown is used for conversion purposes.

- A (95-100), A- (90-94)
- B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82)
- C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72)
- D (60-69),
- F (less than 60)

Late penalties will apply. One to three days late - 10% (of the total mark available for the assignment) and four to seven days late - 20%.

Plagiarism: avoid it. The www is a particular temptation. Bear in mind that the technology that allows someone to find material which can be used without attribution is the same technology which allows someone else to check whether that has happened.

Incomplete

If you do not complete all required work you will fail the course. If you have serious problems completing work by the end of the course you may ask to be designated as 'Incomplete'. However, such a request must fit the requirements of the Academic Catalog: 'A grade of 'I' denotes that the work of a course has not been completed due to an unavoidable emergency, which does not include delinquency or attending to church work or other employment.' Note that I am simply unable to enter an 'incomplete' without the prior approval of the Dean who will insist that these requirements are met. Sorry, but this means you need to get organized!

Withdrawal from the course

NB: the last day to advise the Registrar that you are dropping the course and still being able to receive a refund is 5th September. The last day to advise the Registrar that you are dropping the course without being automatically given an 'F' is 10th October.

Prayers

Students are encouraged to use the Prayer Forum in Moodle. We have the privilege of being able to support one another in this way. Please pray regularly for the others in the class. Although prayers and prayer requests can be posted at any time each student will be asked, on a roster basis, to provide a 'prayer of the week'. Please try and relate the theme of the prayer to the topic being covered that week. It can be an original prayer or one you have drawn from somewhere else. All students are encouraged to pray this prayer as they begin their study for that week. This means that the prayer for the week needs to be posted up *before* the week begins. **A roster will appear in the Prayer Centre** and you will be reminded to visit it during the preliminary, introductory module.

Research Responsibilities

While a considerable amount of material is available in set texts, provided in supplementary reading and advice is available from the instructor, students are reminded of their responsibility to find study material, especially when undertaking assignments. One of the assignments will assist in developing skills in this area. Remember that the Asbury library allows a generous amount of time for borrowing – six weeks – and they will bear the cost of posting material to you (though you have to pay to return them).

ExL Support Contact Information

For **general questions and administrative assistance regarding the ExL program**, contact Dale Hale: ExL_Office@asburyseminary.edu Phone: (859) 858-2393

For **technical support, library research support, library loans, and ExL media** contact Information Commons: Info_Commons@asburyseminary.edu Phone: (859) 858-2233; Toll-free: (866) 454-2733

Accessing Information Commons Materials

1. General Questions:

a. The Information Commons is a "one-stop shop" for all student research, circulation and technical needs. The Information Commons hours are posted here:
<http://www.asburyseminary.edu/information/hours.htm>

2. Materials Requests:

a. To search the library catalog for available materials, click here:
<http://www.asburyseminary.edu/information/index.htm>

b. ExL Students may request books, photocopies or emailed attachments of journal articles/portions of reference books from Asbury Seminary's Library. Please allow 3-10 business days for all requests to be filled. Contact the Information Commons for costs and instructions on how to make requests.

c. ExL students are encouraged to make use of local library resources. Students who live within a 50 mile radius of either the Florida or the Kentucky campus should come to campus to obtain their materials.

3. Research Questions:

a. ExL students are encouraged to contact the Information Commons for research assistance including help determining the best sources to use for a paper, finding book reviews, or research questions about using the online databases or any other library materials.

4. Asbury Scholar - Online Databases:

a. To access the online library resources including the library catalog and full-text journal databases, go to <http://www.asburyseminary.edu/information/index.htm> and enter your 10-digit student ID# number in the login box. Your student ID# is provided on the biographical information section of the student registration webpage. Add a 2 and enough 0's to the front to make a 10-digit number (20000XXXXX where XXXXX = your student id).

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The World-wide-web

The web is a source for this course which is very mixed: some is great and some is very bad. You must be discerning. When surfing the web to find an image or a story about your favorite film star checking for site credibility probably doesn't rate very highly on your agenda. But when using the source for learning and referencing in a paper it is very important.